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ABSTRACT

This document describes a new curriculum and educational program at the Austin College. The program, Individual Development: Encounter with the Arts and Sciences (IDEAS), focuses on the individual development of each student. Emphasis is placed on Austin's movement toward reform, the planning effort to implement the new curriculum, curriculum and scheduling, required interdisciplinary courses, the total institutional project, repercussions throughout the College, evaluation of the students, the goals and objectives of the program, and needed change in institutional structures. (MJM)

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Education as Process at Austin College

Currently developing a comprehensive new curriculum and educational program and installing structures for institutional self-renewal, Austin College is attempting to better meet its students' needs through a challenging restatement of educational tasks and educational roles. Austin College graduate and former employee Suzanne Starnes, now a freelance observer-writer related to evaluation of the project, describes activities at Austin College in the following article.[1]

Austin College in Sherman, Texas, is midway in the four-year development of a new curriculum built on the belief that education is an on-going and serendipitous process instead of a "packaged deal." This view of education has far-ranging implications for all parts of the curriculum, implications which have been recognized at Austin and are being worked on to transform what could be merely a change in curricular structure and nomenclature into truly meaningful reform.[2]

The program's title indicates its thrust: *IDEAS at Austin College* with the acronym IDEAS standing for *Individual Development: Encounter with the Arts and Sciences.* The focus is on individual development, on the growth of each student. The vehicle for that growth is the active encounter by the student with the arts and sciences, the grappling with man's knowledge. The Austin education is a continuing student-centered process of individual and personal development, not a prescribed product received by some hypothetical "average" student.

Conservative Reform

Austin's movement toward real reform can be seen by comparing its pursuits with the analysis of reform of David H. Bayley, professor in the Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver.[3] In his study "The Emptiness of Curriculum Reform" Bayley's main thesis is a negative one, that "... curriculum reform changes nothing that is worth changing." Bayley's thesis is supported by his interpretation of what education is usually thought to be:

> Curriculum reform is insubstantial, superficial, and so profoundly safe because it perpetuates rather than overthrows the most deeply rooted assumption in American higher education; namely, that education consists primarily in providing young men and women with knowledge.

Bayley's own view of education is a sharply contrasting one: "... *the able, vigorous, creative intellect is distinguished not by what it remembers but by what it does*" (emphasis added). This differing view is the reason that Bayley's thesis is fair and viable. Given this stance, he is perfectly correct in his other assertions: that curriculum reform rarely places new demands on teaching staffs, that use of information should be paramount over mere retention of knowledge, and that curricula too often ignore students' previous educational experiences and simply provide again knowledge which they have already been exposed to.

In short, Bayley seems to agree with the Austin view that education goes beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge. Education is not a commodity which teachers can provide and which students can obtain for the right price of memorization and time. Rather, education is process, continuing endeavors in which students and faculty work together, traditional roles begin to meld, teachers guide as well as lecture, students use information, and students actively participate in planning and in doing their education. Moreover, both student and faculty member understand that, to validate the learning process, the student must demonstrate ability in handling cognitive information in a challenging intellectual exercise.

Austin's Comprehensive Plan

Based on a two-year planning effort involving all constituencies, Austin's curricular reform is all-inclusive through the IDEAS program, and the scope is indicated by the use of a four-year project to implement the new curriculum. The Austin College Total Institutional Project is the primary force by which faculty and students are putting the IDEAS program into operation and developing new strategies for stimulating institutional change. Funded by grants totaling $1.3 million from the National Science Foundation and the National Endow-

ment for the Humanities, the Project represents an unprecedented level of cooperation between these two agencies.

With the help of the Project, Austin is redefining the roles of teacher and student to support the emphasis of the IDEAS program. The student is moving into a more prominent and active role in his own education with the teacher serving as facilitator and guide. The nature of the educational task at Austin is thus changing. Austin affirms that the individual development of students rather than subject matter should be the main emphasis of education institutions. Excellence in education is what happens to students. All indirect factors—the social context, faculty credentials, library holdings, athletic program, physical plant—are important, but student development is central.

While the shift in main emphasis from subject matter to student development may represent a change for some educational institutions, it does not mean a lowering of standards. The student can no longer remain in the comfortable niche of knowledge acquisition. Instead, he must move further and demonstrate his intellectual viability, which may or may not rely on *memorization* of data. Education thus becomes *more* substantive as subject matter is infused with activity.

Varied Curriculum and Scheduling

The IDEAS program utilizes a 2-2-1-4 calendar. Normally a student takes two courses during each of two seven-week sessions in the fall term, one course during a four-week January term, and four courses during a fourteen-week spring term. The shorter terms with fewer courses encourage concentrated study, while courses of varying lengths permit different teaching-learning approaches. Equally important is a daily class schedule with a variety of class periods. In many cases class periods are considerably longer than those of more traditional calendars. With these larger time blocks faculty see the need to move from the lecture toward greater use of group methods and individualized learning strategies.

The increased focus on the student and the changing roles of student and teacher are seen in the course Individual Development, central to the entire IDEAS program. Individual Development is a four-year planning process and advising system in which the student works with his "mentor," a faculty member. Together they plan the student's collegiate experience, developing a coherent design specifically fitted to his individual background and future goals. They begin by considering the student's current level of development of his various capabilities—intellectual, aesthetic, societal, religious, vocational, and physical. Using this base of understanding, student and mentor then plan the steps needed to reach both his personal goals and the educational standards of the College.

Required Interdisciplinary Courses

The student/mentor relationship begins with the first course the entering student takes, Communication/Inquiry. The faculty leader of this course becomes the student's mentor, although change of mentor is possible. Communication/Inquiry itself exemplifies emphasis on education as process. The course name suggests the processes occurring—development of various communication abilities, examination of personal identity and values, and acquisition of skills and techniques of intellectual inquiry. The traditional body of knowledge *is* the study of a contemporary topic. Through an interdisciplinary and often problem-oriented approach to the topic, the communication and inquiry processes become the heart of the course.

Processes begun in Communication/Inquiry are broadened in subsequent courses, and subject matter is related across course lines. After Communication/Inquiry the student begins a three-course series in the Heritage of Western Man. These courses are also interdisciplinary experiences, and they tie directly to Communication/Inquiry by continuing the emphasis on values and the development of intellectual inquiry and communication skills.

Policy Research adds a special dimension to the experience of education as process, reflected in the course title. In Policy Research upperclass students and faculty bring the expertise of different disciplines to a team effort to study a specific societal issue and formulate public policy alternatives which could be pursued. This effort naturally builds on the student's understanding of current problems developed in Communication/Inquiry and the Heritage courses and also on the growing foundation of specialized knowledge in the student's concentration.[4]

These are the only courses specifically required for graduation, other than those necessary for the concentration. While they provide similar experiences for all students, they are not the traditional core courses which are principally content- and teacher-oriented. They are purposefully student-centered and share emphasis on processes and interdisciplinary approaches to today's problems.

Building on this core, the student and mentor together design a program to complete the degree with a total of 34 courses. Since specific course requirements are few, planning a degree program is no simple check-list matter. It involves finding the degree plan option that best meets the needs, and then within that option, planning the most appropriate experiences and courses to meet individual goals.

The first degree plan option is the Basic Program which complements the core courses with a six-course Exploratory Sequence designed by the student and mentor to include experience with modes of learning characteristic of disciplines outside his concentration.

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Other selections and courses for the concentration finish the Basic Program. The second option, the Special Program, focuses on a learning contract negotiated by the student and mentor and facilitates planning for nontraditonal or interdisciplinary concentrations. The third option is the Austin Scholars Program, an opportunity for the superior student to meet his goals and potential through educational experimentation.

The Total Institutional Project

The great challenges which the IDEAS program and its implementation present to faculty are recognized in the Total Institutional Project. Because IDEAS involves the total curriculum, the Project is comprehensive, dealing not with narrow areas but with integrating concepts having import for all aspects of the institution. With roles and tasks being redefined, the Project provides resources for faculty and students to redesign courses and activities to harmonize with the overall concerns.

A primary operation of the Project is the Summer Resource Laboratory (SRL) on Changing Tasks and Roles in Higher Education. The six-week SRL presents opportunities for students and faculty to explore institutional and personal role changes and develop new skills demanded by the IDEAS program. Nearly all Austin faculty participate with a representative number of students. Activities are arranged through general workshop sessions and task forces for individualized work and specific areas of concern. Three College-staffed Resource Service Units—Educational Resources, Interactive Computer, and Development Research and Evaluation—provide demonstrations of new approaches and continuous back-up support for all phases.

The style of SRL training experiences provides for an active involvement of participants, using outside help but sharing insights, concerns, and expertise. This cooperative approach has proved much more effective than programs of prescription or remedial pedagogy. In all its activities, the SRL thus exemplifies learning approaches having the greatest value for Austin students.

As the Project progresses, increased time is being delegated to individualized work on courses. Thus, through the Project all courses and programs of study are being reviewed, some being redesigned extensively, to put into practice the concepts of the IDEAS program. Remaining work in the Project will vary according to needs, levels of growth, and emerging priorities with good possibilities for projects to export results to others.

One promising factor in evaluation and in national, regional, and local visibility is the Project's Advisory Panel of prominent educational leaders. These nine people of national stature serve a continuing advisory function for the Project and represent a potentially outstanding liaison function with the funding agencies and the broader world of higher education.[5]

Repercussions Throughout the College

Austin does not know precisely what the results will be at the end of the Project when its IDEAS program will be fully implemented. Most likely, the state of the developing program at that time will not be all that reform advocates hope for. No doubt there will be more to do. On the basis of Professor Bayley's view of education, however, Austin does seem to be on the right track. Activities and changes occurring throughout the curriculum, not just program-by-program structures, further illustrate the progress.

With the IDEAS program encouraging the student to be active in his education, the teacher at Austin College must be able to adapt a course in any of several different ways to best meet student needs. The teacher has increased responsibility for thorough preparation, and the Project supports faculty in preparing to meet individual student and class needs more effectively and responsively. Many factors are involved: helping to overcome obsolescence, training in new educational strategies, developing skills in understanding self and others and in group leadership, organizing and evaluation the learning experience, and integrating a course into a discipline program or across disciplines. With more confidence, better preparation, and varied resources, the faculty member can more readily adapt his role and course structure to respond to student needs without feeling threatened.

Of course, there may be a minimum of fundamental materials which must be covered in a given course. This aspect can be handled through student-paced learning modules. Such modules use pre- and post-test procedures and explicit performance objectives along with alternative methods for achieving the objectives. This procedure frees the teacher for more service as a guide for the student's own inquiry into the subject, and in many cases student suggestions and projects are used to direct the main flow of the course.

Within a course the lecture may have a proper place, but at Austin the tendency for the lecture to be the *main* classroom activity is being attacked on two different fronts. First, faculty are being trained in new approaches, including individualized instruction, peer teaching, group processes, and better use of large time blocks. The SRL provides not only resources but also opportunities for experiences in these directions. Second, the daily schedule with its longer blocks of time encourages a break from the lecture and provides a flexible environment for other approaches. Naturally there are still valid uses for the lecture, but at Austin dependence on lectures is being reduced.

Special opportunities for the student to be actively engaged in education are replacing some lectures. The Social Science Laboratory is a place of resources where studies in social science can be put to practical use, such as in canvassing a neighborhood or conducting an economic study for a local governmental unit. The January Term and seven-week fall sessions provide time periods for other active involvement and there are research protege relationships, field trips, work-study combination, practicums, and individual projects which allow on-site study.

Performance-Based and Individual Evaluation

Evaluation of students within a course is also changing at Austin. In some cases the course is being formulated so that the student must perform a particular task, presupposing the acquisition of certain knowledge or skills, in order to progress to the next point in the course. This point in development may not and does not need to come at the same time in the course for everyone, for the course may be student-paced so that the individual is controlling his rate of progress. Evaluation is thus more frequent and thereby supportive of the student's progress within the course.

From the standpoint of progress throughout the college career, evaluation of the Austin student occurs in the Individual Development course. Through it the student examines his own progress based on where he is at a given time and not simply in relation to his peers. And as Individual Development is initiated through Communication/Inquiry, here also is where the student's personal strengths and limitations are first identified. One means for this is a computerized personality profile which has been used extensively in business situations, has been used in pilot cases in higher education, and is currently being adapted for widespread use as a psychological and educational tool for use with freshman students. Already it has been found valuable at Austin in providing a vehicle for facilitating self-understanding and lubricating processes of attitudinal change inherent in personal development.

The student in the IDEAS program thus takes the major responsibility for his own education while the teacher serves more as facilitator. As the full title of the educational program suggests, the liberal arts and sciences remain a very important aspect of an Austin education, but the difference is that subject matter is now being viewed as a tool for the development of the student and for his use rather than as simply a body of knowledge he must acquire.

The Goal: Synthesis by the Student

The IDEAS program is now well into implementation, and as it matures, one of its strongest points may be its holistic nature, especially from the student's viewpoint. Synthesis is part of the basic structure of Austin's core courses. Values, the roots and nature of contemporary culture, communication abilities, inquiry skills, group processes—all receive emphasis continuing from Communication/Inquiry through the Heritage courses and Policy Research. Moreover, all other courses are being redesigned to strengthen the interrelatedness of the program in parts and in whole.

On a more subtle level, however, synthesis and interrelatedness are being stressed through the positive emphasis on education which meets a particular student's goals and needs. When the student can fit educational activities more closely to his own concerns, a new purposefulness enters his vocational and intellectual pursuits, and the interrelatedness comes in a much more natural and spontaneous manner. Synthesis occurs where it has the most impact, within the student.

Changing Institutional Structures

At Austin there is also the belief that the institution itself can and must be active in its task, that of providing the best environment for education. Here is the reason for the demanding experiences of the Total Institutional Project, with its emphasis on process, not just product. Here also is a reason that other basic institutional changes are being introduced concomitantly. These include a College-wide governance structure whereby representatives of all campus constituents come together in one body, a Program Management System for dealing with faculty incentives while combining constituency participation in decision-making with management accountability, and a Career Development Program for integrating individual faculty needs for growth with institutional needs.

With the new Career Development Program, Austin is participant in and supportive of each faculty member's efforts to grow and improve, to fight obsolescence within his discipline, and to advance understanding of ways his discipline makes its impact in education and society. These personal needs are negotiated in the context of the program goals of the College and give impetus for a continuously reformed learning environment.

Obviously, Austin College has already invested and is continuing to invest great amounts of energy and resources in its approach to education. In relation to Professor Bayley's definition of education—"creative intellect is distinguished not by what it remembers but by what it does"—that approach appears to be well along the road to true reform.

—Suzanne Starnes

[1]Inquiries about the Project should be directed to Dr. Frank C. Edwards, Austin College, Sherman, Texas 75090.

[2]Acknowledgement is made to Dr. William H. Adams of the National Science Foundation for calling attention to a provocative article by Dr. David H. Bayley, and to Dr. Jerry Lincicum, Associate Professor of English at Austin College and his former student Ms. Kathy Kallstrom for their inspiration and valuable ideas.

[3]David H. Bayley, "The Emptiness of Curriculum Reform," *Journal of Higher Education*, XLIII (November, 1972), 591-600.

[4]An article titled, "Policy Research In Undergraduate Learning," by Dr. Shelton L. Williams, Director of the Policy Research Program, appears in the April, 1974, issue of the *Journal of Higher Education.*

[5]Members of the Advisory Panel are: Dr. Wayne H. Holtzman (chairman), director, Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, University of Texas at Asutin; Dr. Horace Hartsell, director, Instructional Development Services, University of Texas at Houston Dental Branch; Dr. Donald L. Hodgkinson, Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California at Berkeley, and president, American Association for Higher Education; Dr. John W. Macy, president, Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc.; Dr. Frederic W. Ness, president, Association of American Colleges; Dr. Martha E. Peterson, president, Barnard College; Dr. Jack W. Powers, regional director, Grants Programs, Research Corporation; Mrs. Edith W. Seashore, private consultant-psychologist, Washington, D.C.; and Dr. Joseph F. Wall, Parker Professor of History, Grinnell College.